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THE TRUE WAY OF ATTAINING DIVINE KNOWLEDGE

JOHN SMITH M. A.

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True way of attaining divine knowledge.
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THE

TRUE WAY

OF ATTAINING

Divine Knowledge

By John Smith, M. A.

(Reprinted from the 1st edition of his Sermons. Pub. 1660)

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AUG 1930
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The following passages of Scripture were used as the text of this Discourse:

PSALM 3: 10.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments."

JOHN 7: 17.

"If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God."

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THE TRUE WAY OF ATTAINING DIVINE KNOWLEDGE.

SECTION I.

That Divine things are to be understood rather by a spiritual sensation than a verbal description, or mere speculation. Sin and wickedness prejudicial to true knowledge. That purity of heart and life, as also an ingenuous freedom of judgment, are the best grounds and preparation for the entertainment of *Truth*.

IT hath been long since well observed, that every art and science hath some certain principles upon which the whole frame and body of it must depend; and he that will fully acquaint himself with the mysteries thereof, must come furnished with some *precognita,* that I may speak in the language of the Stoics. Were I indeed to define divinity I should rather call it a divine *life,* than a divine *science*; it is something rather to be understood by a *spiritual sensation,*

than by any *verbal description,* as all things of sense and life are best known by sentient and vital faculties; as the Greek philosopher has well observed; "*Everything is best known by that which bears a just resemblance and analogy with it;*" and therefore the Scripture is wont to set forth a good life as the prolepsis and fundamental principal of divine *science; "Wisdom* hath builded her house and hewn out her seven pillars;" but "the fear of the Lord is the *beginning of wisdom,*"—the *foundation* of the whole fabric.

We shall therefore, as a preface to what we shall afterward discourse upon the heads of divinity, speak something of this *true method of knowing,* which is not so much by *notions as actions;* as religion itself consists not so much in *words* as in *things.* They are not always the best skilled in divinity, that are the most studied in those products, into which it is sometimes digested, or that have erected the greatest monopolies of art and science. He that is most *practical in divine things* hath the purest and sincerest knowledge of *them,* and *not* he

that is most dogmatical. Divinity indeed is a true *efflux* from the eternal Light, which like the sunbeams, does *not only* enlighten, but *heat* and *enliven;* and therefore our Saviour hath in his Beatitudes, connected *purity of heart,* with *the beatific vision.* And as the eye cannot behold the sun, unless it be sunlike, and hath the form and resemblance of the sun drawn in it; so neither can the soul of man behold God, unless it be Godlike, *hath God formed in it,* and is *made "partaker of* the divine nature." And the Apostle Paul, when he would lay open the right way of attaining to divine truth, saith, that "*knowledge* puffeth up," but it is *"love"* that edifieth. The knowledge of divinity that appears in systems and models is but a poor wan light; but the powerful energy of divine knowledge displays itself in *purified souls*: Here we shall find the true "*land of truth.*"

To seek our divinity merely in books and writings, is *to seek the living among the dead;* we do but in vain seek God many times in these, where his truth too often is not so much enshrined, as *en-*

tombed; no, seek for God within thine own soul; he is best discerned (as Plotinus phraseth it), by an *intellectual touch* of him; we must *see with our eye, and hear with our ears, and our hands must handle the word of life,* that I may express it in St. John's words.

The soul itself hath its sense as well as the body; and therefore David when he would teach us how to know what the Divine Goodness is, calls not for *speculation* but *sensation, taste and see how good the Lord is.*

That is not the best and truest knowledge of God which is wrought out by the labor and sweat of the *brain,* but that which is kindled within us by an heavenly warmth in our *hearts.* As in the natural body it is the heart that sends up good blood and warm spirits into the head, whereby it is best enabled to perform its several functions; so that which enables us to know and understand aright in the things of God, must be a living principle of *holiness within us.* When the *tree of knowledge* is not planted by

the *tree of life,* and sucks not up sap from thence, it may be as well fruitful with *evil* as with *good,* and bring forth *bitter* fruit as well as *sweet.* If we would have our knowledge thrive and flourish, we must water the tender plants of it with *holiness.*

When Zoroaster's scholars asked him what they should do to get *winged souls,* such as might soar aloft in the bright beams of Divine Truth, he bid them bathe themselves in the *waters of life*; they asking what they were, he tells them, *the four cardinal virtues,* which are the four rivers of Paradise.

It is but a thin, airy knowledge that is got by mere speculation, which is ushered in by syllogisms and demonstrations; but that which springs forth from *true Goodness,* as Dryden speaks; brings such a Divine Light into the soul, as is more clear and convincing than any demonstration.

The reason why, notwithstanding all our acute reasons and subtle disputes, Truth prevails no more in the world, is,

we so often disjoin *Truth* and true *Goodness,* which in themselves can never be disunited; they grow both from the same Root, and live in one another. We may, like those in Plato's deep pit with their faces bended downwards, converse with *sounds* and *shadows;* but not with the *Life* and *Substance* of Truth, while our *souls* remain defiled with any vice or lusts. These are the black *Lethe*-lake which drench the *souls* of men: he that wants *true virtue,* in heaven's logic is blind and cannot see afar off (2 Peter 1). Those filthy mists that arise from impure and terrene minds, like an *atmosphere,* perpetually encompass them, that they cannot see that Sun of Divine Truth that shines *about* them, but *never shines into any unpurged souls;* the darkness comprehends it not, and the foolish man understands it not.

All light and knowledge that may seem sometimes to rise up in unhallowed minds, is but like those fuliginous flames that arise up from our culinary fire, that are soon quenched in their own smoke;

or like those foolish fires that fetch their birth from terrene exudations, that do but hop up and down, and flit to and fro upon the surface of this earth where they were first brought forth; and serve not so much to enlighten, as to delude us; nor to direct the wandering traveller into his way, but to lead him farther out of it. While we lodge any filthy vice in us, this will be perpetually twisting up itself into the thread of our finest-spun *speculations;* it will be continually climbing up into the *supreme* powers of the soul, into the bed of Reason, and defile it: like the wanton Ivy twisting itself about the Oak, it will twine about our *judgments* and *understandings,* till it hath sucked out the *life* and *spirit* of them. I cannot think such black oblivion should possess the *minds* of some as to make them question that Truth which to *good* men shines as bright as the sun at noonday, had they not foully defiled their own *souls* with some hellish vice or other, how fairly soever it may be they may dissemble it. There is a *benumbing*

spirit, a *congealing vapor,* that ariseth from *sin* and *vice,* that will stupify the senses of the *soul,* as the Naturalists say there is from the *Torpedo,* that smites the senses of those that approach to it. This is that venemous *Solanum,* that deadly *Nightside,* that derives its cold poison into the *understandings* of men.

Such as *men* themselves are, such will God Himself seem to be. It is the *maxim* of most wicked men, that the Deity is some way or other like themselves: their souls do more than whisper it, though their tongues be silent, yet their lives cry it upon the house-tops, and in the public streets. That *idea* which men generally have of God is nothing else but the picture of their own complexion: that archetypal notion of Him which hath the supremacy in their minds, is none else but such an one as hath been shaped out according to some pattern of themselves; though they may so clothe and disguise this *idol* of their own, when they carry it about in a pompous proces-

sion to expose it to the views of the world, that it may seem very beautiful, and indeed anything else rather than what it is. Most men (though it may be they themselves take no great notice of it), like that dissembling Monk, are of a different judgment in the schools, from what they are in the retirement of their private closets. There is *a double head,* as well as *a double heart.* Men's corrupt hearts will not suffer their notions and conceptions of Divine things to be cast into that form that an higher *Reason,* which may sometimes work within them, would put them into.

I would not be thought all this while to banish the belief of all *innate notions* of Divine Truth: but these are too often smothered, or tainted with a deep dye of filthy lusts. It is but light buried and stifled in some dark body, from whence all those colored, or rather discolored, notions and apprehensions of divine things are begotten. Though these *common notions* may be very busy sometimes in the vegetation of divine *knowledge;*

yet the corrupt vices of men may so clog, disturb and overrule them (as the *Naturalists* say this unruly and masterless *matter* doth the natural forms in the formation of living creatures), that they may produce nothing but *monsters* miserably distorted and misshapen. This kind of science, as Plotinus speaks: *"Companying too familiarly with matter, and receiving and imbibing it into itself, changeth its shape by this incestuous mixture."*

At best, while any inward lust is harbored in the minds of men, it will so weaken them, that they can never bring forth any masculine or generous knowledge; as Aelian observes of the stork, that if the night-owl chanceth to sit upon her eggs, they become presently as it were unfertile, and all incubation rendered impotent and ineffectual. Sin and lust are alway of an hungry nature, and suck up all those vital affections of men's *souls* which should feed and nourish their *understandings*.

What are all our sublime *speculations*

of the Deity, that are not *impregnated* with *true goodness,* but insipid things that have no taste or life in them, that do but swell the empty froth in the souls of men? They do not feed men's souls, but only puff them up and fill them with *pride, arrogance, contempt* and *tyranny* towards those that cannot well ken their subtle *curiosities*: as those philosophers that Tully complains of in his times, which made their knowledge only matter of ostentation, to boastfully display and set off themselves, but never caring to square and govern their *lives* by it. Such as these do but spider-like take a great deal of pains to spin a worthless web out of their own bowels, which will not keep them warm. These indeed are those silly *souls,* that are *ever learning, but never come to the knowledge of the Truth.* They may with Pharoah's lean kine, eat up and devour all *tongues* and *sciences,* and yet when they have done, still remain lean and ill-favored as they were at first. Jejune and barren speculations may be hovering and

fluttering up and down about Divinity, but they cannot settle or fix themselves upon it: They unfold the *plicatures* of Truth's *garment,* but they cannot behold the lovely *face* of it. There are hidden *mysteries* in Divine Truth, wrapped up one within another, which cannot be discerned but only by divine *Epoptists.*

We must not think we have then attained to the *right knowledge* of Truth, when we have broken through the *outward shell* of *words* and *phrases* that *house* it up; or when by *logical analysis* we have found out the dependencies and coherencies of them one with another, or when, like stout champions of it, having well guarded it with the invincible strength of our *demonstration,* we dare stand out in the face of the world, and challenge the field of all those that would pretend to be our *rivals.*

We have many *grave* and *reverend idolaters* that worship Truth only in the *image* of their own *wits;* that could never adore it so much as they may seem to do, were it anything else but such a *form*

of *belief* as their own wandering speculations had at last met together in, were it not that they find their own image and superscription upon it.

There is a *knowing of the Truth as it is in Jesus,* as it is in a *Christ-like nature,* as it is in that sweet, mild, humble, and loving Spirit of Jesus, which spreads itself like a *morning-sun* upon the souls of good men, full of life and light. It profits little to know Christ *himself* after the flesh; but he gives his Spirit to good men, that search the deep things of God. There is an inward beauty, life and loveliness in Divine Truth, which cannot be known but only then when it is digested into life and practice. The Greek philosopher could tell those high-soaring Gnostics that thought themselves no less than Jove's eagles, that could (as he speaks in the Comedy): *"Walk in the air, and speculate about the sun,"* and cried out so much: "Look upon God;" that *"without virtue and real goodness God is but a name;* a dry and empty notion." The *profane sort of men,* like the old

Gentile Greeks, may make many ruptures in the walls of God's Temple, and break into *the holy ground,* but yet may find God no more there than they did.

Divine Truth is better understood as it unfolds itself in the purity of men's hearts and lives, than in all those subtle niceties into which curious wits may lay it forth. And therefore our Saviour, who is the great Master of it, would not, while he was here on earth, draw it up into any *system* or *body,* nor would his disciples after him; *he* would not lay it out to us in any *"canons"* or *"articles of belief,"* not being indeed so careful to stock and enrich the world with *opinions* and *notions,* as with *true* piety, and a god-like pattern of *purity,* as the best way to thrive in all spiritual understanding. *His main scope was to promote an holy life,* as the best and most compendious way to a *right belief.* He hangs all true acquaintance with Divinity upon the doing God's will: "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." This is that

alone which will make us, as St. Peter tells us, that we shall not be "barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour."

There is an inward sweetness and deliciousness in divine truth, which no sensual mind can taste or relish: this is that *"natural"* man that savors not the things of God. Corrupt passions and terrene affections are apt of their own nature to disturb all serene thoughts, to precipitate our *judgments,* and warp our *understandings.* It was a good maxim of the old Jewish writers: *"The Holy Spirit dwells not in terrene and earthly passions."* Divinity is not so well perceived by a subtle wit "as by a purified sense," as Plotinus phraseth it.

Neither was the ancient philosophy unacquainted with the *way* and *method* of attaining to the knowledge of Divine things; and therefore Aristotle himself thought a *young* man unfit to meddle with the grave precepts of *morality,* until the heat and violent precipitancy of his youthful affections was cooled and

moderated. And it is observed of Pythagoras, that he had several ways to try the capacity of his *scholars,* and to prove the *sedateness* and *moral* temper of their minds, before he would entrust them with the sublimer mysteries of his philosophy. The Platonists were herein so wary and solicitous, that they thought the *minds* of men could never be purged enough from those earthly dregs of *sense* and *passion*, in which they were so much steeped, before they could be capable of their divine metaphysics; and therefore they so much solicit (as they were wont to phrase it), *"a separation from the body,"* in all those that would sincerely understand Divine Truth; for that was the scope of their philosophy. This was also intimated by them in their defining *philosophy* to be: *"a meditation of death;"* aiming herein at only a *moral* way of *dying,* by loosening the soul from the *body* and this *sensitive* life; which they thought was necessary to a right *contemplation* of *intelligible* things, and therefore beside those *cleansing virtues*

by which the *souls* of men were to be separated from fleshly filth, they devised a further way of *separation* more accommodated to the condition of philosophers, which was their *mathemata,* or mathematical contemplations, whereby the souls of men might farther shake off their dependency upon *sense,* and learn to go as it were alone without the crutch of any *sensible* or *material* thing to support them; and so be a little inured, being once got above the *body,* to converse freely with *immaterial* natures, without looking down again and falling back into *sense.* Besides many other ways they had, whereby to rise out of this *"dark body,"* (as they were wont to call them) several steps and ascents out of this miry cave of mortality, before they could set any sure footing with their intellectual part in the land of *light* and *immortal being.*

And thus we should pass from this *topic* of our discourse, upon which we have dwelt too long already, but that before we quite let it go, I hope we may

fairly make this use of it farther (besides what we have openly driven at all this while), which is: To learn not to devote or give up ourselves to any private *opinions* or *dictates* of men in matters or *religion,* nor too zealously to defend the *dogmas* of any *sect.* As *we should not,* like rigid *censurers,* arraign and condemn the creeds of other men, which we comply not with, before a full and mature understanding of them, ripened not only by the natural sagacity of our *reasons,* but by the benign influence of holy and mortified affection; so neither should we over-hastily subscribe to the *symbols* and *articles* of other men. They are not always the *best* men that blot most paper; Truth is not, I fear, so *voluminous,* nor swells into such a mighty bulk as our *books* do. Those minds are not always the most chaste that are most parturient with these learned *discourses,* which too often bear upon them a foul stain of their unlawful propagation. A bitter juice of corrupt affections may sometimes be strained into the ink of our

greatest *clerks,* their *doctrines* may taste too sour of the cask they come through. We are not always happy in meeting with that wholesome food (as some are wont to call the *doctrinal-part* of religion), which hath been dressed out by the cleanest hands. Some men have too *bad hearts* to have *good heads; they* cannot be good at *theory,* who have been so bad at the *practice,* as we may justly fear too many of those from whom we are apt to take the *articles of our belief* have been. While we plead so much our right to the patrimony of our *fathers,* we may take too fast a possession of their errors, as well as of their sober opinions. There are *innate prejudices,* and deceitful *hypotheses,* that many times wander up and down in the minds of good men, that may fly out from them with their graver determinations. We can never be well assured what our *traditional divinity* is; nor can we securely enough addict ourselves to any *sect* of men. That which was the philosopher's motto we may a little enlarge, and so fit it for an ingen-

uous persuer after Divine Truth, viz: *"He that will find Truth, must seek* it with a *free judgment,* and a *sanctified mind."* He that thus seeks, shall find; *he* shall live in *Truth,* and *that* shall live in *him;* it shall be like a stream of living water issuing out of his own *soul;* he shall drink of the waters of *his own* cistern, and be satisfied; he shall every morning find this *heavenly manna* lying upon the top of his own *soul,* and be fed with it to eternal life; he shall find satisfaction *within,* feeling himself in conjunction with Truth, *though all the world should dispute against him.*

SECTION II.

An objection against the method of knowing laid down in former Section, answered. That men generally, notwithstanding their apostacy, are furnished with the radical principles of true knowledge. Men want not so much means of knowing what they ought to do, as wills to do what they know. Practical knowledge differs from all other knowledge, and excels it.

AND thus I should again leave this argument, but that perhaps we may all this while have seemed to undermine what we intend to build up. For if Divine Truth spring only up from the *root* of true *goodness,* how shall we ever endeavor to be good, before we know what it is to be so? Or how shall we convince the gainsaying world of Truth, unless we could also inspire virtue into it?

To both which we shall make this reply: That there are some *radical principles* of knowledge that are so deeply

sunken into the souls of men, as that the *impression* cannot easily be obliterated, though it may be much darkened. Sensual baseness doth not so grossly sully and bemire the souls of all wicked men at first, as to make them with Diagoras to deny the Deity, or with Protagoras to doubt of, or with Diodorus to question the *immortality* of rational souls. Neither are the *common* principles of virtue so pulled up by the roots in all, as to make them so dubious in stating the bounds of virtue and vice as Epicurus was, though he could not but sometime take notice of them. Neither is the *retentive power* of Truth so weak and loose in all sceptics, as it was in him, who being well scourged in the streets till the blood ran about him, questioned when he came home, whether he had been beaten or not. Arrianus hath well observed: That the *common* notions of *God* and *virtue* impressed upon the souls of men, are more clear and perspicuous than any else; and that if they have not more *certainty*, yet have they more *evi-*

dence, and display themselves with less difficulty to our *reflexive* faculty than any geometrical demonstrations; and these are both available to prescribe out ways of virtue to men's own souls, and to force an acknowledgment of Truth from those that oppose, when they are well guided by a skillful hand.

Truth needs not any time fly from *reason,* there being an eternal amity between them. They are only some private *dogmas,* that may well be suspected as spurious and adulterate, that dare not abide the trial thereof. And this *reason* is not everywhere so extinguished, as that we may not by that enter into the souls of men. What the *magnetical* virtue is in these earthly bodies, that *reason* is in men's minds, which when it is put forth, draws them one to another. Besides, in wicked men there are some distastes of vice, and flashes of love to virtue; which are the *motions* which spring from a true *intellect,* and the faint strugglings of an *higher* life within them, which they *crucify again* by their wicked

sensuality. As Truth does not always act in good men, so neither doth *sense* always act in wicked men; they may sometimes have their *sober fits;* and a Divine Spirit blowing and *breathing* upon them may then blow up some live sparks of true *understanding* within them; though they may soon endeavor to quench them again, and to rake them up in the ashes of their own earthly thoughts.

All this, and more that might be said upon this argument, may serve to point out THE WAY OF VIRTUE. We want not so much *means* of knowing what we ought to do, as *wills* to do that which we may know. But yet all that *knowledge* which is separated from an inward acquaintance with virtue and goodness, is of a far different nature from that which ariseth out of a true *living sense* of them, which is the *best discerner* thereof, and by which alone we know the true perfection, sweetness, energy, and loveliness of them, and all that which can no more be known by a *naked demonstration,* than

colors can be perceived of a blind man by any definition or description which he can hear of them.

And further, the clearest and most distinct *notions* of Truth that shine in the souls of the common sort of men, may be extremely clouded, if they be not accompanied with that answerable practice that might preserve their integrity. These tender *plants* may soon be spoiled by the continual droppings of our corrupt affections upon them; they are but of a weak and feminine nature, and so may be sooner deceived by that wily serpent of sensuality that harbors within us.

While the soul is *full of the body,* while we suffer those *notions* and *common principles* of religion to lie asleep within us *the power of an animal life* will be apt to incorporate and mingle itself with them, and that *reason* that is within us will be infected with those evil opinions that arise from our *corporeal* life. The more deeply our souls dive into our bodies, the more will *reason* and *sensuality* run one into another, and

make up a most dilute, unsavory and muddy kind of *knowledge.* We must therefore endeavor more and more to withdraw ourselves from these *bodily* things, to set our souls as free as may be from a miserable slavery to this base *flesh;* we must shut the *eyes* of *sense,* and open that brighter *eye* of the soul, as the philosopher calls our *intellectual faculty,* which indeed *all* have, but *few* make use of it. This is the way to see clearly; the light of the Divine World will then begin to fall upon us, and those pure coruscations of immortal and ever-living Truth will shine out into us, and in God's own light shall we behold *him.* The fruit of this *knowledge* will be sweet to our taste, and pleasant to our palates, sweeter than the honey or the honey-comb. The priests of Mercury, as Plutarch tells us, in the eating of their holy things, were wont to cry out: "Sweet is truth." But how sweet and delicious that Truth is which holy and heaven-born souls feed upon in their mysterious con-

verses with the Deity, who can tell but they that taste it?

When *reason* once is raised by the mighty force of the Divine Spirit into a converse with God, it is turned into *sense*. That which before was only *faith* well built upon sure *principles,* (for such our *science* may be) now becomes *vision*. We shall then converse with God *intuitively*, whereas before we conversed with him only with our *discursive* faculty, as the Platonists were wont to distinguish. Before we laid hold on Him only with a struggling, agonistical, and contentious *reason,* hotly combating with difficulties and sharp contests of divers opinions, and laboring in itself, in its deductions of one thing from another; we shall then fasten our minds upon *him,* with such a serene *understanding,* such an *intellectual calmness* and serenity as will present us with a blissful, steady and invariable sight of God.

SECTION III.

Men may be considered in a fourfold capacity in order to the perception of Divine things. That the best and most excellent knowledge of Divine things belongs only to the true and sober Christian, and that it is but in its infancy while he is in this earthly body.

AND now if you please, setting aside the *Epicurean* herd of brutish men, who have drowned all their own sober *reason* in the deepest *Leathe* of *sensuality*, we shall divide the rest of men into these *four* ranks, according to that method which Simplicius upon Epictetus hath already laid out to us, with a respect to a *fourfold* kind of *knowledge,* which we have all this while glanced at.

The *first* whereof is: *"That complex and multifarious man* that is made up of *soul* and *body,"* as it were by a just equality and *arithmetical* proportion of *parts* and *powers* in each of them.

The knowledge of these men I should call in Plutarch's phrase. "a knowledge wherein *sense* and *reason* are so twisted up together," that it cannot easily be unraveled, and laid out into its first principles. Their highest reason is "complying with their senses;" and both conspire together in vulgar opinion. To these that motto which the Stoics have made for them may very well agree, their *life* being steered by nothing else but *opinion* and *imagination.* Their higher notions of God and religion are so entangled with the bird-lime of fleshly passions and mundane vanity, that they cannot rise up above the surface of this dark earth, or easily entertain any but earthly conceptions of heavenly things. Such *souls* as are here lodged, as Plato speaks, are *"heavy behind,"* and are continually pressing down to this world's centre, and though, like the *spider,* they may appear sometimes moving up and down aloft in the air, yet they do but sit in the loom, and move in that web of their own gross fancies, which they

fasten and pin to some earthly thing or other.

The *Second* is: *"The man that looks at himself as being what he is rather by his soul than by his body;* that thinks not fit to view his own face in any other *glass* but that of *reason* and *understanding;* that reckons upon his *soul* as that which *was made to rule*, his *body* as that which was born *to obey,* and like an handmaid perpetually to wait upon his higher and nobler part. And in such an one the *common principles* of *virtue* and *goodness,* are more clear and steady. To such an one we may allow "more clear and *distinct opinions,*" as being already "in a method or course of *purgation,*" or at least fit to be initiated into "the lesser *mysteries of religion.*" For though these *innate* notions of Truth may be but poor, empty, and hungry things of themselves, before they be fed and filled with the *practice of true virtue,* yet they are capable of being impregnated and exalted with the *rules* and *precepts* of it. And therefore the Stoics supposed that the

doctrine of political and moral virtues was fit to be delivered to such as these, and though they may not be so well prepared for *Divine virtue* (which is of a higher emanation), yet they are not immature for human, as having the *seeds* of it already within themselves, which being watered by answerable practice, may sprout up within them.

The *Third* is: *He whose soul is already purged by this lower sort of virtue, and so is continually flying off from the body and bodily passion, and returning into himself.* Such in St. Peter's language are those *"who have escaped the pollutions which are in the world through lust."* To these we may attribute a lower degree of *science,* their inward sense of *virtue* and moral *goodness* being far transcendent to all mere *speculative* opinions of it. But if this *knowledge* settle here, it may be quickly apt to corrupt. Many of our most refined moralists may be, in a worse sense than Plotinus means, *"full with their own pregnancy;"* their souls may too much heave and swell with

the sense of their own virtue and knowledge; there may be an ill *ferment of self-love* lying at the bottom, which may puff it up the more with pride, arrogance and self-conceit. These forces with which the Divine bounty supplies us to keep a stronger guard against *the evil spirit,* may be abused by our own rebellious pride, enticing of them from their allegiance to God, to strengthen itself in our souls, and fortify them against heaven; like that supercilious Stoic, who, when he thought his mind well armed and appointed with wisdom and virtue, cried out *Sapiens contendet cum ipso Jove de felicitate.* They may make an airy heaven of these, and wall it about with their own self-flattery, and then sit in it as gods, as Cosroes the Persian king was sometimes laughed at for enshrining himself in a temple of his own. And therefore, if this *knowledge* be not attended with *humility,* and a deep sense of *self-penury* and *self-emptiness,* he may easily fall short of that *true knowledge of God* after which we seem to aspire.

We may carry such an *image* and *species* of ourselves constantly before us, as will make us lose the clear sight of the Divinity, and be too apt to rest in a mere *"logical life"* (an expression of Simplicius) without any true participation of the *Divine life,* if we do not (as many do, if not all, who rise no higher) relapse and slide back by vain-glory, popularity, or such like vices, into some mundane and external vanity or other.

The *Fourth* is: *The true metaphysical and contemplative man, who, running and shooting up above his own logical or self-rational life, pierceth into the highest life.* Such a one who, by *universal love* and *holy affection,* abstracting himself from himself, endeavors the nearest union with the Divine Essence that may be; knitting his own centre, if he have any, unto the centre of Divine Being. To such an one the Platonists are wont to attribute *"a true Divine wisdom,"* powerfully displaying itself "in an *intellectual life,"* as they phrase it. Such a knowledge, they say, is always pregnant

with Divine virtue, which ariseth out of an happy *union* of souls with God, and is nothing else but a living imitation of a godlike perfection drawn out by a strong, fervent love of it. This Divine knowledge (as Plotinus speaks) makes us amorous of Divine beauty, beautiful and lovely; and this Divine *love* and *purity* reciprocally exalts Divine *knowledge;* both of them growing up together, like that Eros and Anteros that Pausanias sometimes speaks of. Though, by the Platonists' leave, such a *life* and *knowledge* as this is, peculiarly belongs to the true and sober Christian, who lives in Him who is Life *itself,* and is enlightened by Him who is the Truth *itself,* and is made partaker of *the Divine unction,* and "knoweth all things," as St. John speaks. This *Life* is nothing else but *God's own breath* within him, and an *infant-Christ* (if I may use the expression) formed in his soul, who is in a sense *"the shining forth of the Father's glory."* But yet, we must not mistake; this *knowledge* is but here in its infancy; there is an

higher knowledge, or an higher *degree* of *this* knowledge that doth not, that cannot, descend upon us in these earthly habitations. We cannot here see "face to face;" here we can see *but in a glass,* and that *darkly,* too. Our own imaginative powers, which are perpetually attending the highest acts of our souls, will be breathing a gross dew upon the pure glass of our *understandings,* and so sully and besmear it that we cannot see the *image* of the *Divinity* sincerely in it. But yet this *knowledge,* being a true, heavenly fire kindled from God's own altar, begets an undaunted *courage* in the souls of good men, and enables them to cast a holy scorn upon the poor, petty trash of this life, in comparison with divine things, and to pity those poor brutish Epicureans that have nothing but the mere husks of fleshly pleasures to feed themselves with. The sight of God makes pious souls breathe after that blessed time when mortality shall be swallowed up of Life, when they shall no more behold the Divinity through

those dark *mediums* that eclipse the blessed *sight* of it.

THE END.

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